

January 5, 2012

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave
Washington, DC 20500

Mr. President,

As the Board of Directors of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), we are writing on behalf of the nation's chief state school officers to reiterate our strong belief that congressional action to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) prior to the beginning of the next school year is vital to interests of students, parents and citizens.

Further delaying reauthorization will have meaningful consequences for students, classrooms and schools, and as the ten year anniversary of No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) approaches later this week, we respectfully ask that you redouble your efforts to update the law.

States across the country are leading critical reforms that move far beyond the baseline established by NCLB and demonstrate a deep and meaningful commitment to higher levels of accountability and student success. This work includes the state-led movement to develop and adopt college and career ready standards and design next generation assessment and accountability systems aligned to those standards. We urge you to transform the ESEA to catch-up with these important reforms and enable further state and local progress. Given NCLB's lack of alignment with the current landscape and waning public legitimacy, time is of the essence to establish a new federal framework that requires state leadership in college and career ready standards and transparent accountability while promoting state and local innovation and flexibility in how we achieve those goals.

We understand that both Democrats and Republicans share a deep commitment to improving educational outcomes for all children, and that many ideas about how to improve ESEA have bipartisan support. For example, pending proposals aim to hold states to a high bar for accountability, without hampering state decision-making by imposing a one-size-fits all federal approach. We hope that Congress and the Administration will not miss this chance to focus on fundamental areas of agreement and work together and with state and local leaders to address the difficult policy challenges remaining in the legislative process.

In the absence of Congressional action, many states will take advantage of the ESEA waiver process offered by the Administration as a means to further important reforms. We are eager to ensure that the waiver process can be an engine for states to raise the bar toward college and career readiness and to promote state and local innovation in getting there. However, temporary waivers cannot be a substitute for Congressional reauthorization that comprehensively updates ESEA for every state and all students.

We believe the bipartisan bill approved by the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) sets the stage for a good faith floor debate in the Senate and later negotiations with the House to develop a final package reflecting the best ideas of both parties. We also look forward to the release of the Education and Workforce committees' draft bill later this week, to



enable positive negotiations within the House and the Senate. We also look forward to working with Congress to address the key policy recommendations of our membership, including the attached recommendations for improving the Senate HELP Committee bill.

So long as the federal government makes a significant contribution to funding public education, it has a proper role to play in ensuring accountability for student success and effective use of taxpayer dollars towards achieving those results. Through continued Congressional action, focused on areas of agreement rather than on disagreement, we believe bipartisan reauthorization can be completed by the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year. We urge you to continue moving the process forward and stand ready to assist you.

Sincerely,

The CCSSO Board of Directors

Tom Luna
Idaho Superintendent of Public Instruction
President, CCSSO

Mitchell Chester
Massachusetts Commissioner of Education
President-elect, CCSSO

Chris Koch
Illinois Superintendent of Education

Tony Bennett
Indiana Superintendent of Public Instruction

Terry Holliday
Kentucky Commissioner of Education
Instruction

Michael Flanagan
Michigan Superintendent of Public

June Atkinson
N.C. Superintendent of Public Instruction

Larry Shumway
Utah Superintendent of Public Instruction

Patricia Wright
Virginia Superintendent of Public Instruction

CC:
Secretary Arne Duncan
Senator Harry Reid
Senator Mitch McConnell
Senator Tom Harkin
Senator Michael Enzi
Speaker John Boehner
Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi
Congressman John Kline
Congressman George Miller



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING THE SENATE HELP COMMITTEE BILL, S. _____

The ESEA Reauthorization bill recently approved by the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions' bill sets the stage for a good faith floor debate in the Senate and later negotiations with the House to develop a final package reflecting the best ideas of both parties. CCSSO believes the legislation could be strengthened by addressing the following concerns:

- Clarify the bill's requirement that all states must set meaningful performance targets for all schools and districts that include ambitious, achievable goals for closing achievement gaps. We support the discretion states are granted to define these goals within state context, rather than requiring adherence to national performance targets, but embrace the idea that states must demonstrate continued progress towards appropriate goals.
- Allow states to use a range of valid outcome measures for identifying their lowest performing schools. The committee bill appears to limit states in identifying the 5% lowest achieving schools based solely on assessments in content areas for which there are statewide assessments as well as graduation rates for high schools, but allows for the use of other valid outcome measures for all other schools, effectively creating two accountability systems. Valid outcome measures, such as college remediation rates, should be permitted to properly identify the lowest performing schools at a state's discretion, to get a more accurate account of student performance and promote a unified system.
- The legislation should expect states to develop meaningful teacher and leader evaluation systems. States must develop these systems in collaboration with key stakeholders, but we believe the expectation should be to develop the system within the state without prescription from the federal government. We believe these systems should be based in significant part on student achievement and include multiple measures.

